

[From Farming to Politics]

Approximately 2,250 words SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: FROM FARMING TO POLITICS

Date of First Writing March 17, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Sam T. Clowney

Fictitious Name Sam T. Colin

Place Winnsboro, South Carolina

Occupation Retired Farmer

Name of Writer W.W. Dixon.

Name of Reviser State Office

Sam T. Colin, an aged man, lives with his son, George M. Colin, in the Winnsboro Mill village on the Southern outskirts of the town of Winnsboro. He is six feet two inches in height and weighs one hundred and eighty-six pounds; has a large head resembling a two-yolked hen egg; is aggressive of manner and speech; and has been a lively and industrious personality in Fairfield County's history for the past fifty years.

Coming into the town hall, without salutation, he said: "I wonder 2 if you'd like to buy a puppy for five dollars this morning? You know women and girls like to have these kind of pets, and these puppies are genuine fox terriers. They are out of a little slut I got from Bill

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Ellison and a small terrier dog I got from Henry Phillips. You've seen both and must have admired them."

"Sit down, Sam, Suppose we talk awhile about the days that are gone. We'll talk about the puppies later. As old Policeman Gilbert used to say, 'Maybe you'd like to wet your whistle with a drop of red eye before you begin.' Yes? Well, drink heartily."

"Well, Dick, I am now 77 years old, and, while my right hand has lost its cunning, my tongue will not cling to the roof of my mouth this morning.

"Yes, Moses Colin was my father, and my mother was Susan Colin. Her grandfather was one time sheriff of old Fairfield District. He was some pumpkin. I wouldn't fool you.

"I was born near Buckhead, a post office on a star mail route, before the coming of the rural mail delivery. My birth was March 6, 1862.

"My oldest brother, James R., was a Confederate soldier. He died of dysentery in the War of Secession. The next in the family was John Simonton. Then came Sister Hester; then Brother Robert, who for many years was a policeman in the city of Columbia. Next was Sister Mary Elizabeth, who married, lived, and died in Winnsboro. I was the youngest child and am the only surviving one of the family.

"Buckhead, near where I was born, was the Means' Settlement. A very aristocratic element of our people had their homes there before the Civil War. Our small plantation and home were hemmed in and surrounded 3 by the gentry - such people as Governor John Hugh Means, Dr. James Furman, Chancellor Marper, Dr. McMahon, and Congressman Trette, who married one of the Means girls. Here Preston S. Brocks, who used a cane on Senator Summers of Massachusetts in the U. S. Senate, came a courting and married another one of the Means girls. The Lyles, first settlers in the county, lived not far from us. I grew up in this neighborhood a little over-awed by such fine people and a little disgruntled that the Lord or economic conditions had made it so our family couldn't hold a candle to such

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elegance and fine doings as went on among them. We only owned 318 acres of land and a few slaves.

“After the Civil War, when the Negroes were set free, our family was better able to meet the changed conditions from slave to free labor than those surrounding us. The boys in our neighborhood knew nothing but how to ride and make gallant speeches to the girls. The girls knew how to ride a horse on a crazy sidesaddle and how to dance. We boys in our family could do anything a slave boy was required to do, and my sisters could do all a slave girl could do.

“My first school days began when I was six years old. I went to a one-teacher school, taught by Miss Josephine Ladd. She liked for us to call her Miss Joe. We had only one book the first month, Webster's Blue Back Speller. Then we were put in arithmetic and learned how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide. I think we went to Miss Joe four years. My next teacher was Miss Chanie Coleman. Went to her three years. The last school I attended was the Feasterville Boarding House School, taught by Prof. Busbee.

“My father encouraged independence in thought and self-reliance 4 in his family, and, when I became eighteen years old, I was parcelled off fifty acres of land, given a horse and told: “See what you can do for yourself.’ At this time, I was six feet two inches tall and weighed two hundred ten pounds. I was the best wrestler in the county.

“I made good as a one-horse dirt farmer before I was twenty-one years old, in spite of the lien law prices, which were twenty percent higher than cash prices.

“I made some extra money on the side by buying up poor cows and calves in the winter, fattening them up in the spring of the year, and selling then to the beef markets in Winnsboro and Chester. This brought me out of the slavery of the lien law credit shackles, and I increased the number of my plows and farm acreage. I bought one hundred seventy-five acres of land and became independent of any assistance from my father.

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"My success went a little to my head. But my head, as you can see, is shaped like a double-yolked hen egg. At that time, it could hold a good deal of foolishness in one side and a whole lot of wisdom in the other side.

"Looking at these shreds and patches today, one would hardly think I was once one of the dandies and fops in Fairfield County. Roach, a tailor of Winnsboro, made my clothes. And old man Bob Dunbar, an Irishman, made my sixteen dollar calfskin boots. The year of Grover Cleveland's first election, I wore a Cleveland white beaver hat. And tied around my neck was an Allan G. Thurman red silk handkerchief, as a token of my admiration of the Vice President on the ticket with Cleveland. I kept a fine pair of driving horses.

"Thus equipped and arrayed like Solomon in all his glory, I drove up one day to the home of an influential and prominent citizen, kidnaped one 5 of his girls, and drove off and got married, much to the amazement of everybody and the [consternation?] of the prominent citizen, my father-in-law.

"The result of that elopement has been my children: George, who holds a responsible outside job with the Winnsboro Mills; Russell, who died two years ago in Florida; Sam Jr., living in Charleston, South Carolina, and my four daughters.

"I was setting pretty in 1910. I had been able to acquire 596 acres of land and had it in a fine state of cultivation and farming condition. It was stocked with mules, brood mares, and a stallion. The pastures were fenced for cattle, and a cotton gin equipment was on the place. I had money in the bank, and my older children were in Clemson and Winthrop Colleges.

"Then the fool part of my double-compartment head got the upper hand and commenced to function. I bought a Swiss cottage in Winnsboro and moved my family to town. I excused myself for the lack of loyalty to the country life by saying I wanted to give my

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younger children the advantages that were supposed to flow from a huge school like Mt. Zion Institute.

"A family newly come to town tries like the devil to get in with society people. They go to much expense to keep in the swim, so to speak. You've heard the saying, 'An idle brain is the devil's work shop.' Well, it's true. I started [lonnging?] around the pool rooms, the livery stables, and taking old cronies in my surry to baseball games in the surrounding towns. My farm was neglected, and I spent more than my income.

"I might have got straight, but the political bee got in my bonnet 6 and kept buzzing about my big head until I ran for the legislature and was elected.

"I was wholly unfitted for the job, and being occupied with its duties didn't have a tendency to decrease my expenses.

"While in politics, [I?] endorsed accommodation papers at the banks to the tune of \$40,000.00 and put up as collateral security twenty-five bales of cotton, then in the State warehouse system. Nearly every copper and intangible asset was swept away by the failure of my father-in-law and brother-in-law, for whom I had stood security. I am now left with a job of bailiff for the court of general sessions for Fairfield County.

"Some strange things can happen in the administration of the criminal law. I don't mind relating one that overtook me once, after it has been so many years [since?] it happened. Two friends of mine, Albert C. and Charley F. and myself were subpoenaed to appear as [witnesses?] in a case at Union Courthouse, in February, 1902, I think it was. At the conclusion of the case, we were paid off by the clerk of court. Then we went to the bank, got our certificates cashed, proceeded to the dispensary, and bought some fine whiskey. From there, we went to the Marion Hotel and registered for dinner. After going to the washroom, where we opened up the liquor, all imbibed to such an extent as to become pretty gay and lively.

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"Albert and Charley were fond of pranks and devilment at my expense. We went into the dining room and, it being a very cold day, I sat at the table without removing my overcoat. I sat between them. It was a good dinner, and I became deeply absorbed in consuming a part of it, to the neglect of everything also happening about me. The two friends, taking advantage of my preoccupation of mind, stealthily filled my large overcoat pockets with knives, forks, spoons, and table linen.

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When I had finished eating my dinner, I got up and told them I would wait for them in the lobby. As I was going out, I did notice them gesticulating to the Negro waiter, but thought little of it.

"It seemed they were telling him I was a kleptomaniac and was carrying off the hotel's knives, forks, spoons, and even the doilies of the hotel in my pockets and to go out and stop me.

"Imagine my surprise and indignation when the Negro boy came rushing out into the lobby and accused me of trying to get away with the hotel's property. The lobby was crowded with people.

"The first thing I did was to knock the waiter down. I then gave vent to such a frenzy of words that the police was called in to quiet the disturbance. I was overpowered and taken to jail, before Albert or Charley could come to my assistance. That was a pretty rough joke, but our friendship survived it. They are both dead now, and the occurrence is one of my happy memories. Though, at that time, I thought it was tragic and a hell of a trick and a bad way to treat a friend.

"I was elected to the House of Representatives of South Carolina, in 1915, and took my seat in January, 1916.

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"After I had been sworn in, a very likely handsome gentleman from Charleston came to me and said, 'Hello, old fellow. I want you to come to my room after adjournment and let's get acquainted. Some friends will be there who'll be helpful to you in bringing you at once to the front in your career here.' I accepted the invitation gladly.

"When I got there, a half dozen or more members of the House had arrived, and more came in later. All the old members became talkative. There were two barrels of beer in the room, one Schlitz and one Budweiser[:?] And several quarts of liquor were on a table. The consensus of opinion, I 8 gathered, was that it was easy to get to the legislature the first time, but hard as nails to get reelected. Our host explained how he got back the second time. He rose and said: 'Sam, when your predecessor, D., was down here, we roomed together and had a kind of David and Jonathan friendship. I felt like I had done nothing to distinguish myself thus far as a member of the House and didn't merit reelection. I sat gloomy before that fireplace one night and my friend D. asked what was the matter. I replied, "Are we friends enough for you to do something for me without asking any questions?" D. said, "What is it?" I said, "I want you to go into the engrossing department tomorrow morning and introduce a bill into the House prohibiting all freight trains from having their initial runs in South Carolina on Sunday."

"D. came back with the rejoinder: "In short, you want me to proclaim myself a poor lawyer, a fool for lack of sense, and a sissy type of legislator. I can't do it, T.'" "But my political life depends on your doing this, D. Please do it. And in twenty hours you'll see the vital reasons for it."

"Well, such was our Damon and Pythias friendship that D. introduced the bill. The next night it was read out at the Speaker's desk and referred to the Railroad Committee, of which I was a member. It was published in the News and Courier of Charleston the next morning.

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“That night I entered this room with a sheaf of telegrams in my hands from Charleston County and the islands adjacent to Charleston. I said to D., “See here, all these telegrams protest against your Sunday bill. They say the passage of it will destroy their truck business. They have asked me to arrange a hearing before the committee. A hundred or more wish to appear and show that it will be unfair to them in competition with Florida and Georgia truck farmers in getting their truck to Baltimore and northern markets. They have asked me to do everything to kill your bill.” D. said nothing.

“Well, sir, Sam, it seemed like all the Charleston truck farmers came to the hearing. Before the committee, I made the speech of my life against the bill, with D.'s consent, and I secured an unfavorable report, which was adopted by the full house.

“My activities in regard to the bill carried me sky high in the next primary election, and I was returned to the House at the head of the ticket.’

“I did not care to return to the House after my term expired, and I retired.

“How much land did I ever own at one time? Well, I bought the following tracts at different times, 295 acres, 318 acres, 178 acres, 11 acres and 123 acres. Total 1278. And I lost all this land on an accommodation endorser and the failure of two banks.

“I am now living with my son, George, who is in the outside service of the Winnsboro Mills. He attends to cultivation of plants and shrubs and is in charge of the beautification of the premises of the homes.

“My time is taken up in breeding rat terriers. But I'm going into the chicken raising business. I'd like to sell eggs and friers to all the mill operatives. I think there is money in the business.”